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After the fall: an analysis of post-communism

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that insights from Tocqueville help us to understand post-communism. Tocqueville is initially helpful in helping us appreciate the extraordinary vacuum that has followed the fall of state socialism. Vacuums tend to be filled, however, and the first part of the paper accordingly concerns itself with nationalism. But not every country suffers from nationalism, and the second part of the paper argues—against currently dominant theory—that instant democratization is not likely to stymie economic reform. The third part of the paper notes that the absence of a civil society is, in the long run, much more of a problem than a solution: the chances of successfully consolidating democracy depend upon destroying venal and cumbersome states and in creating leaner and more efficient replacements. The conclusion notes that a variety of regimes is likely to characterize the region once the initial period of vacuum has come to an end.

It is both true and often remarked that social scientists largely failed to understand the collapse of state socialism. The process of that collapse was, however, illuminated by Tocqueville—with his claim that a traditional state is at maximal danger when it seeks to reform itself being very widely quoted (Tocqueville 1955: 169–203. Cf. Przeworski 1992a; Jowitt 1922). This essay goes beyond the breakdown of socialist regimes, so staggeringly complete, in order to examine the character and probable political dynamics of the strange, almost disembodied world of post-communism. I argue that this world is best understood by making systematic use of Tocqueville. Insights derived from the sociologist concerned with the problem of transition from authoritarian to democratic regimes allow us to better understand nationalism, class behaviour and the relations of state to civil society. Before taking those topics in turn, however, it is vital to understand Tocqueville’s thought—and in particular how he changed his mind when confronting the issue that obsessed him.
Tocqueville's Final Theory

Tocqueville's early writings show him to have been very much a member of a generation that, particularly in the light of the Revolution, had come to distrust the people (Boesche 1987: 27–112). More particularly, Tocqueville accepted uncritically the general view that the reign of the masses was likely to undermine the chances of liberty, that is, of the condition to which he was at all times devoted (Tocqueville 1985: 115). Generalized dislike was shown to the individualism of bourgeois society, together with premonitions as to the political consequences of the isolation that its social form encouraged. Tocqueville insisted that individualism was a modern concept 'unknown to our ancestors, for the good reason that in their days every individual necessarily belonged to a group and no one could regard himself as an isolated unit' (1955: 96). Such individualism began by encouraging a retreat into private life, only then to create an egoism opposed to all public spirit (Tocqueville 1969: 539–41. Cf. Lamberti 1970). But his visceral dread of a tyranny of the majority was based on something more: the people would be prone to envy, that is, to the desire to level, even—or perhaps especially—if such equality could only be realized under a common dictatorship. This bias in Tocqueville can be seen in the surprise shown when discovering that the American were able to combine liberty with equal social conditions. He confided to his travel journal his contempt for the middle classes, noting reluctantly that 'in spite of their petty passions, their incomplete education and their vulgar manners, they clearly can provide practical intelligence' (1971: 259).

Tocqueville's loathing of this syndrome—privatization in combination with envy resulting in despotism—never changed. None the less, he very distinctively changed his mind as to its causes. The happy conclusions to the study of America were in fact of limited use to Tocqueville. The USA had effectively been born free, and could thereby cast little light on those societies which had to make a transition, with or without liberty, from the aristocratic era to that characterized by equal social conditions. Moreover, the second volume of Democracy in America sees Tocqueville beginning to doubt his initial argument (1969: 505–6). It was only in the second part of his masterpiece, The Old Regime and the French Revolution, that he arrived at a settled line of argument.

Tocqueville's masterpiece is best known for its account of centralization under the old regime. Tocqueville forcefully highlights the state's distrust of its own people.

Any independent group, however small, which seemed desirous of taking action otherwise than under the aegis of the administration filled it with alarm, and the tiniest free association of citizens,
However harmless its aims, was regarded as a nuisance. The only corporate bodies tolerated were those whose members had been hand-picked by the administration and which were under its control. Even big industrial concerns were frowned upon. In a word, our administration resented the idea of private citizens having any say in the control of their own enterprises, and preferred sterility to competition. (1955: 64)

This analysis is of very great relevance to understanding the failure of state socialist societies to liberalize successfully. This type of negative political rule, in which security was felt to reside in depoliticization, so destroyed civil society that a reforming elite could find no partners with whom to engage in the liberalization game (Bova 1991). The physiognomy of authoritarian socialism was, in other words, very different from that of authoritarian capitalism. Recent discussions of transitions to democracy (O'Donnell et al. 1986) have been based on the experience of authoritarian capitalism, and are of little use in understanding either state socialism or post-communism.

But the analysis of centralization is not the real heart of The Old Regime and the French Revolution. Much more important — for present purposes as much as for Tocqueville himself — is the analysis contained in Chapters 8 to 10 of Part Two. The first of these three chapters explains ‘how France had become the country in which men were most like each other’. What was involved here was the convergence of income levels and styles of life of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. The second stage of the argument is a nice example of Tocqueville’s love of paradox: Chapter 9 considers ‘how, though in many respects so similar, the French were split up more than ever before into small, isolated, self-regarding groups’. This section begins with an analysis of local politics before the advent of absolutism. Records showed that classes had once been able to trust each other, and to co-operate with each other in defending regional interests. This spirit of class co-operation was destroyed most of all by the granting of tax and legal immunities to the French aristocracy: this destroyed all community of interest, and naturally made it senseless to serve as leaders against the encroachments of the state. The final stage in the argument, Chapter 10, bluntly considers ‘the barriers set up between classes’. It is important to underline what is being claimed here since it represents a fundamental reversal of Tocqueville’s initial set of preconceptions. Liberty is undermined less by passions released by the age of social conditions and much more by the strategy of the dominant elite. Kings rather than the people are to be blamed for France’s inability to embrace liberty in modernity.

Almost all the vices, miscalculations and disastrous prejudices I have been describing owed their origin, their continuance, and
their proliferation to a line of conduct practised by so many of our Kings, that of dividing men so as the better to rule them. (1955: 136)

The exercise of political liberty according to Tocqueville depends upon trust between different social classes, whilst it in turn breeds responsibility; differently put, participation is the only effective means of training citizens suited to liberty. At best, the old regime had enforced a type of social atomism that led to extreme privatization. At worst, the old regime had taught people how to hate each other. This legacy was not without consequence.

It was no easy task bringing together fellow citizens who had lived for many centuries aloof from, or even hostile to, each other and teaching them to co-operate in the management of their own affairs. It had been far easier to estrange them than it now was to reunite them, and in so doing France gave the world a memorable example. Yet, when sixty years ago the various classes which under the old order had been isolated units in the social system came once again in touch, it was on their sore spots that they made contact and their first gesture was to fly at each other's throats. Indeed, even today, though class distinctions are no more, the jealousies and antipathies they caused have not died out. (1955: 107)

This is a stunning passage. Post-communist societies are characterized by a sort of vacuum. One element involved here is loss of faith in the socialist project (Gellner 1993). But more important is the absence of trust to which Tocqueville’s analysis points. Social behaviour in these circumstances can seem rather odd. The extent of privatization is seen in the very low turnout at recent elections in both Poland and Hungary, and in the generalized uncertainty as to what one’s interests are and how to best represent them (Rychard 1992). More generally, the inability to co-operate may well make it difficult to install market relations: all the overlapping linkages necessary for flexible late industrial society may be undermined by generalized distrust (Gabor 1990: Stark 1990). Most obvious of all is the tendency of some groups to ‘fly at each other’s throats’ – a topic so vital that it must be taken first.

NATIONALISM

The fundamental property of a vacuum is that it is unstable. Forces rush in to fill a gap. What this involves in personal terms has been graphically portrayed by existentialism. Living without fixed identity is painful and confusing. The point about Mathieu, the hero of Sartre’s Roads to Freedom sequence of novels, is that freedom is a burden: everything has to be thought through, and nobody can be trusted. It is scarcely surprising to discover that human beings flee this condition. Bluntly, social life per se depends upon the ability to trust, to
so regularize encounters that fear and uncertainty are contained (Goffman 1971).

The most obvious way in which this has already taken place in East and Central Europe is by means of nationalism. It is very probable that the emergence of nationalism was inevitable. In retrospect, it has become obvious that the Bolsheviks carried on the legacy of the Russian empire, with Stalin adding to it in the years immediately after 1945 (Gellner 1991): the end of the First World War saw the destruction of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires and the remarkable restoration of Russian power by military means. States such as Georgia and the Ukraine quickly lost the independence that they had gained because of revolutionary turmoil, and they were thereafter reintegrated into the empire. That this was supposedly a union of socialist republics misled many, with some of the analyses declaring the impossibility of nationalism under socialism being published astonishingly late (Motyl 1987). The Soviet state did, of course, seek to control nationalism by traditional means, that is, by the stick of brutality (including a licentious use of deportations) and the carrot of metropolitan subsidies (Khazanov 1991). But it remained the case that the empire was run for and by Russians (Khazanov forthcoming). It is vital to stress this since perhaps the key variable involved in the classical pattern of nationalism is that of the blocked social mobility of the local elite (Gellner 1964). This most certainly applied within the direct Soviet sphere. When this was added to a model of industrialization that caused almost unbelievable ecological catastrophes for a Baltic republic such as Estonia, the provenance of nationalism becomes unproblematic. Indeed, it is not strictly accurate to talk about nationalism filling the gap left by the fall of communism: co-operation by ethnic means was often far more than an idea limited to intellectuals before that collapse.

The slight hesitation in the above paragraph deserves to be aired. Not every potential nationalism comes to fruition – that is, nationalism often is but an idea, limited to a group of intellectuals. What matters for an ethnic group is the ability to gain the good things in life, but it is not inevitable that this will occasion raising the nationalist flag. One notable exception to this were the Scots, proud to be – as Smith and Hume had it – North Britons. The point to be emphasized about North Britons is that they had amazing mobility within the empire (Colley 1992: 117–32). But it would be a mistake to characterize the situation in purely material terms (Hall 1993b). What made it possible to realize interest was regime. The fundamental way in which nationalism can be controlled is by granting political rights. Voice undermines exit (Hirschman 1972). It is worth noting in this connection that historians of Austro-Hungary now debate the extent to which the empire was doomed by nationalism (Mann 1993: ch. 10). Revisionists insist that the granting of autonomy would have drawn
the teeth of the nationalist movements, not least as the Slavs were painfully aware of the way in the empire protected them against Russia and Prussia. In this connection it is worth noting that few separatist movements within established liberal democracies have succeeded. Quebec has great difficulties in this regard, its nationalists interestingly gaining power precisely as internal voice has come to be restricted. This principle returns us to the vacuum created by the fall of communism.

In a striking article, Linz and Stepan have demonstrated that the Spanish liberalizers were able to defuse the demands of the nationalities by first holding national rather than provincial elections (Linz and Stepan 1992). This move immediately undermined support for separatist parties: the public demonstration that the system was open, that benefits could be gained without the costs of separation, confirmed that the axis of political life would continue to be that of the traditional Spanish state. Linz and Stepan further note that such a democratic opening was not taken in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. This certainly mattered: Slovenes might have been prepared to stay in a democratic Yugoslavia but chose to exit from what seemed likely to become a Serb autocracy (Banac 1992). Nationalism is by no means out of control in post-communist societies: both Ukraine and Russia have, at the time of writing in mid-1993, pulled the teeth of a mass of nationalist movements because they remain loyal to democracy (Krawchenko 1993). A consideration of Czechoslovakia — where federal and regional elections were held simultaneously — certainly becomes relevant at this point: it is extremely unlikely that Slovak independence would have been supported by a majority of Slovaks in a referendum, although the Czechs might have chosen to divest themselves of a demanding region looking set to block their own reforms. None the less, no referendum was taken there. For Soviet or Yugoslav leaders to have taken the liberal option would, of course, have required nothing less than a metamorphosis in the character of the elite. Democratic centralism did not encourage this sort of mentality. Very much to the contrary, those members of the old nomenklatura who had no capacity or opportunity to retain privilege by means of capitalism found in the nationalist card the perfect means of avoiding downward social mobility.

The pessimism engendered by this last point can in part be mitigated. Strong nationalism, especially within unitary societies, can help development in the long run (Szporluk 1988; Zhao and Hall 1994). The energies of the Baltic states cannot be exaggerated: the extent to which they are prepared to undergo sacrifice is already being tested but may well remain a considerable resource. More obviously, some of the states that are being created are effectively mono-ethnic: this may well ensure the Czech Republic and Slovenia a future at once affluent and democratic. Poland and Hungary were, of course, turned
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into unitary societies thanks to the ethnic cleansings of Hitler and Stalin. This is not to deny that these countries still have the capacity for symbolic politics. Hungarian minorities in Slovakia and Transylvania ensure that a nationalist card can still be played, as does the possibility of large amounts of German investment in western Poland. None the less, the role of symbolic politics has declined sufficiently for it to make it necessary to change the focus of our attention. Where symbols do not dominate, the vacuum remains. What are the chances for the double transition to democracy and to capitalism in these circumstances?

DEMOCRACY AND CAPITALISM

The absence of nationalist politics would naturally seem to encourage optimism. However, work done on the politics of transition, East and West, by scholars influenced by rational choice theory tends to pessimism: economic reform cannot proceed without democracy, but democracy has no chance without prior economic change (Elster 1990; Offe 1991; Przeworski 1991). This analysis needs both to be appreciated and to be treated with a measure of scepticism.

The necessity of democracy for economic reform is obvious. The people will not accept any reforms which causes a devastating fall in their standard of living while a few are enriched; this rejection is likely to be especially visceral if members of the old nomenklatura are seen to be doing well out of the new order. The immediate consequence of democracy is accordingly likely to be the rejection of economic reform. If this becomes full-blooded, disaster will surely follow. For the legitimacy of the new regime can only be secured by some measure of economic success, and this will never come unless the principle of the market is embraced. Descriptively, this leads Przeworski to argue that the East is becoming like the South: a cyclical process is likely to be repeated in which authoritarian rule will be followed by episodes of popular control – whose economic mismanagement will then ensure the breakdown of democratic regimes (Przeworski 1991: 190–1).

Prescriptively, this line of argument leads Przeworski to favour gradual change over the various versions of shock therapy: the costs of change must not so hurt the people that they abandon democracy (1992b).

This suggests an alternative view: that democracy depends upon a prior introduction of economic reforms by authoritarian means. The logic of this position is much reinforced by banal considerations of the political benefits of economic growth. On the one hand, money-making may serve as an avenue of advancement sufficient to distract former power-holders; on the other hand, adjustments will be made by larger sections of the populace through bribery, that is, social peace.
will be purchased by the provision of Danegeld. The early liberalization of British and American politics was certainly much aided by the surrounding presence of prosperous capitalist relations (Plumb 1969; Hofstader 1969. Cf. Hall 1993a). The logic of this point suggests that it may be easier to achieve democracy in China than it is in East and Central Europe: perestroika before glasnost may be the best nostrum. The strategy that most obviously follows from this position is one prepared to contemplate curtailing popular politics so as to sustain economic reforms. Balcerowicz has put this case with unequalled force: what matters in his eyes is creating capitalists by any means, not least because successful capitalism will inevitably lead to democracy.

These authors powerfully describe a vicious trap. But there are good reasons not to accept uncritically the whole case being presented. Most obviously, society is still in a vacuum: amazingly little resistance from below has come to such reforms as have been instituted. One element causing that vacuum – the destruction of belief in the socialist project – can usefully be accentuated. The claim that the East may become the South is outdated. The remarkable extent to which the South has changed can be seen in the endorsement of market principles by leaders as different as Menem and Salinas: there is now remarkable elite unity in many countries as to the costs of exiting from the international economy. Despite four different governments and a President potentially of populist character, there has not been any clear reversal of Polish economic reforms; equally Havel's instinctive distrust of the market has not led him to criticize Klaus's reforms.

More generally, scepticism should be directed at the economics of the position outlined – which is not to deny that economic growth often helps social peace and may finally be necessary to it. It would be very pleasant to record continuation of awareness in post-communist societies of the fact that political inequality can be worse than its social counterpart. Some do remember the humiliation entailed in sucking up to the powerful, and welcome a moneyed society with relief; but memory is generally rather short, and to that extent the logic of the position outlined makes sense. None the less, consideration needs to be given to an entirely different principle which runs counter to economism. The collapse of communist regimes should highlight the essential stability of liberal capitalist regimes (Hall 1994: ch. 3). In principle, an order based on social inequality and political democracy might well seem a recipe for chaos. It is scarcely surprising that many have therefore insisted that social peace has resulted from economic growth. But this may not be correct. Britain survived the mass unemployment of the Thatcherite experiment without any real threat to social peace. This may well be because those disadvantaged by radical economic policies had limited capacity to mobilize: the unemployed are not unionized, whilst the young – but not the old –
were given special handouts. In general, greater political instability was evident when the state involved itself in industrial relations by seeking to enforce corporatist arrangements than when it ignored the unions, blaming everything on the market (Bradley and Gelb 1980).

Historical sociology goes a little further to suggest that a generalizable pattern is at work here. This pattern can be highlighted by noting that the political militancy of nineteenth-century working classes varied by nation. At times, Russian workers were genuinely revolutionary, and so to the left of the rather respectable socialism of the German social democrats. At the opposite end of the spectrum, there was famously no socialism in the USA, with Britain only slightly more radical in having a labour rather than a socialist party. What seems best to explain the different degree of militancy is the attitude of the state. The presence of a liberal regime meant that class conflict took on an industrial rather than a political character – with Britain gaining a labour party because of the occasional interferences of the state. In contrast, the political exclusion of autocracy and authoritarianism concentrated attention on the state for the most obvious of reasons: the state became the enemy because of its arbitrariness and its refusal to allow unions to organize (Geary 1984; McKibbin 1990; Mann 1987; Katzenelson and Zolberg 1987; McDaniel 1988). Early realization of this point lay behind Max Weber’s call for limits to Wilhelmine authoritarianism. Neither capitalists nor the state had anything to fear from liberal measures towards the working class: to the contrary, the more that class felt itself to be part of society, the less likely it was to embrace radicalism (Weber 1978. Cf. Mommsen 1984: ch. 5).

One way in which the point can be highlighted is by endorsing the ethic of eighteenth- rather than of nineteenth-century social theorists: political arbitrariness creates much more anger than does social inequality. People prefer reform to revolution, the possibility of peaceful change to the dangers of the barricades. Liberalism diffuses conflict through society whereas authoritarianism concentrates it. Had a Havel been able to act as a reformer, as a member of a loyal opposition within socialist society, it is probably unlikely that he would have been forced to fight the state.

The general position can best be encapsulated by recalling the way, already noted, in which Tocqueville changed his mind, thereby replacing a social with a political explanation for habits of the heart incapable of embracing liberty. Social movements gain their character from the state with which they interact. We have seen this to be true of nationalism. Equally, there was no essence to the working classes of the late nineteenth century: their political behaviour varied, according to the circumstances in which they had to exist.

The immediate relevance of this analysis for post-communist
societies has been neatly captured by Ellen Comisso. There may be less to fear from movements from below than had been expected. It also follows that it is entirely possible to have pluralism and a wide variety of small groups competing for influence without ever pulling large numbers of people into political life . . . if states remain strictly liberal and do not grant organisational advantages to large groups, it may well be possible to maintain pluralism without extensive mass movements. If, for example, workers are free not to join unions, many will simply not join. (1991: 187)

Liberalism before democracy may be best, especially if it is part of a package which includes a successful economy, but liberalism by itself may depoliticize – and so continue that vacuum of post-communism which leaves the state sufficient autonomy to press through economic reforms. There is some evidence that this is beginning to happen. One recent strike in the Fiat works in southern Poland was broken not by the state but by workers prepared to accept the company’s offer; and there is evidence that varied negotiations are beginning to take place between capitalists and workers, without benefit of state involvement. Such depoliticization is secure when the sociological principle involved is understood. No evidence is available to me as to the extent of such understanding within post-communist societies, but it is worth noting that calls – both from within those societies and from outsiders such as Przeworski – for the state to continue to claim responsibility for industrial relations are likely to increase social conflict. Gradualism has dangers of its own. As it is, the current depoliticization brought by liberalism presents a window of opportunity which allows economic reforms to continue. And one crucial factor may currently be increasing such depoliticization. That capitalism is being created by the state in post-communist societies is, according to the logic of the preceding principle, likely to lead to social mobilization. But the move away from political capitalism towards voucher schemes of various sorts has so muddled the waters that perception of state responsibility for basic accumulation is declining (Stark 1992; Bruszt 1992).

THE STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

If a measure of state autonomy represents a window of opportunity, that in itself is no guarantee, pace Balcerowicz, of successful outcomes. If we are to understand the situation in post-communist societies it is necessary to analyse – by establishing key ‘functional prerequisites’ for the consolidation of democracy so as to ask whether they will be met – the nature of the relations between state and society. Let us begin by considering the belief apparently held by Adam Smith that ‘little else is requisite to carry a state to the highest degree of opulence from the
lowest barbarism, but peace, easy taxes, and a tolerable administration of justice; all the rest being brought about by the natural course of things’ (Stewart 1980: 322).

No sociologist with any sort of indebtedness to Max Weber can easily accept the final sentiment expressed. For Weber’s point was that the work ethic was by no means universal, and indeed that it was born from the ‘irrational’, anti-materialistic desire to fulfil divine purpose. It would most certainly not make sense to limit economic success to the presence or absence of the work ethic, nor to insist that this ethic always has religious sources. It may be that socialist engineering has increased economic chances by changing the occupational structure, and by improving both the position of women and standards of education. These societies are less ‘dual’ than they were historically; in this sense, at least, they have outpaced Latin America (Jánoš 1989). To be set against this, however, is the existence of differential microeconomic capacities resulting from the length of the period under socialism. It is often claimed that the work ethic can survive forty-five but not seventy-five years, and striking support for the first of these propositions is now available for Hungary (Szelenyi 1988) – with the Czech Republic, with general memories both of industry and democracy, looking to be still more favoured.

The principal rationale for citing Smith’s views is, however, to stress that he most certainly had a positive conception of the state. *The Wealth of Nations* was itself meant to be ‘a handbook for the legislator’. Its theme was that capitalists were dangerous because they could so easily conspire against the public; only the enlightened, that is, the political aristocracy who bought Smith’s works, were capable of defending the market principle against those whose immediate interest might make them destroy it (Philipson 1986. Cf. Comisso 1991). In addition, the state had to counteract the effect of ‘mental mutilation’ by means of education, to provide defence, to improve transportation and public facilities, and above all to protect property. The tasks of ‘a tolerable administration of justice’ are extensive. The sly reason why this is being stressed is, of course, to question the wisdom of neo-liberal reformers in post-communist societies whose attack on the state is at times unremitting. If the abuses of state power in the past make this entirely comprehensible, it should none the less be stressed that what is actually needed is both the destruction of dangerous state power and the creation of much-needed state capacities.

One can gain further purchase on the matter by the thinking in abstract terms about what causes states to have strength. Michael Mann (1984) has usefully suggested that states have both infrastructural and despotic powers. It is certainly useful to realize that despotically powerful states may in fact be very weak, unable to penetrate and organize their societies; and it is also true that modern conditions – railroads, bureaucracy, improved means of communication – lend
all industrial states considerable power. None the less, Mann's notion of infrastructure is severely limited, and his conception far too static. The capacity to penetrate society depends upon the state's capacity to co-operate with society. Tocqueville realized this particularly clearly. A lessening of despotism/retention of local liberties increased total taxation in Languedoc, to whose political economy he devoted an important appendix in *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*. The aristocracy contributed to a government that it could control; in consequence of this and of the greater knowledge created by trust, the level of social infrastructure and general prosperity was strikingly higher than in the rest of France. Constitutionalism breeds trust, and trust empowers. And this was true more generally of England as compared to France: for Tocqueville what matters about England is that its state is far more powerful than that of France, despite – or, rather because of – its lack of absolutist powers. In other words, a civil society is not one simply marked by the presence of powerful groups organized apart from the state; what matters quite as much is the capacity for co-operation, for different sources of power to point in the same direction. Perhaps the best phrase to sum this up is that applied by Richard Samuels (1987) to the Japanese state. His revisionist account shows MITI to be anything but all-powerful: it is listened to partly because it listens in a curious 'politics of reciprocal consent'. Recent accounts of the developmental states of East Asia have shown that their tremendous skill in protecting infant industries by differential pricing so as then to escort them on to the market does depend in part upon their despotic powers; but co-operation is helped quite as much by the fact that businessmen actually know that it is, so to speak, their developmental state (Deyo 1987; Amsden 1989; Wade 1990).

The pattern of historical development has given Eastern and Central Europe a tradition of unwieldy, despotic and infrastructurally weak states (Janos 1989; Schopflin 1990). Such states had been colonized by landed elites opposed to commerce; late industrialization added to this by making state service an avenue of social mobility for new middle-class segments. In principle social revolution was supposed to have changed all this, but in fact severe limits to basic legitimacy meant that socialist states remained cumbersome and essentially weak – as was so dramatically proved by the manner of their demise.

Not much has yet changed. At present, states have few interlocutors.

there is no new class of big farmers, with more than, say, 100 hectares. And although some specialisation has occurred in farming, there are not yet any strong producers' organisations – a meat-producers' association, for example, or a flower growers'
association. There is no organisation of middle class self-employed professionals, to protect and promote their interests. Small tradesmen have not been very keen to organise themselves, while the few big capitalists have been more interested in setting up social clubs than business associations. (Wesolowski 1992: 17)

It is important to note that these words come from a Pole analysing the current situation in his country. Solidarity was a great crusade, based on an extraordinary national tradition of romanticism, nationalism and Christian salvationism, representing a move of society against the state. But organization against the state is not the same thing as the self-organization of society – and of co-operation with a constitutional polity. Civil society has not yet been born. The state may have some autonomy, but this scarcely makes up in power terms for the limited capacities consequent on the absence of linkages with society. In the long run a democratic deficit is a problem, not a solution (Misztal 1992: 167–77). The absence of settled structures, especially those of stable political parties, means that there is a continuing risk that the present vacuum in Central and Eastern Europe may yet be filled by symbolic politics which are superficially attractive but in fact societally regressive. The candidacy of Tyminski in the last presidential campaign in Poland is a clear example of this sort of politics, and it is all too easy to imagine alternative sources of symbolic outpouring (Seligman 1992: ch. 4). The analytic point here is that settled social groups and established political parties lead to regularity and predictability because they control their members. But this is only one way of looking at the matter, and it is not perhaps the most important. The ultimate justification for democracy lies in its capacity to produce better political rule than that provided by other systems. Wise men can no more be relied upon to produce economic success than social harmony; only democracy has the capacity to correct mistakes that arise, to provide the input of information necessary for rational policy-making.

It is hard to take a venal and weak state and to turn it into a body capable of co-ordinating and co-operating with society. This transition has most obviously been accomplished by foreign intervention. Even Britain managed the last stages of its endogenous transition only due to intense pressure of war, with the effects of conquest on Germany and Japan being so obvious as to need no commentary (Rubinstein 1983; Mann 1993: ch. 4). In this regard, the situation in post-communist societies in comparative terms is difficult because the victors of the Cold War are tending to shun the defeated rather than to reconstruct them. But perhaps the key problem can be highlighted by noting that it is mistaken to say that old nomenklatura have the choice of becoming nationalists or of entering into the market. There is a third option: such actors can benefit from privatization whilst retaining linkages.
with the state. This situation – of privatization without marketization, of a class dependent upon the state – is extremely dangerous (Staniszkis 1991: part 1). Such political capitalists may not be efficient, whilst their skimming off of profitable sectors will subject the state to an intolerable fiscal crisis if greater subsidies are required to support remaining industry; both processes may well give capitalism a bad name, and thereby encourage cynicism and apathy – and rage (Cf. Hagopian 1990). All in all, it is easy to envisage the emergence of just the sort of state against which Adam Smith inveighed (Schopflin 1991). One factor that may be set against this is the extent to which the state was freed, in largest part because of different patterns of collapse, from the Communist Party. It already looks as if the greater the break, the greater the chances of economic success. This may well prove to be the key factor in the region, allowing only some countries to consolidate democracy.

In so far as democracy stands against political capitalism, against piratization rather than genuine privatization, it is profoundly to be welcomed. Differently put, more rather than less democracy is needed. For democracy is on the side of economic efficiency, protesting against too great a continuity between old and new – thereby signalling willingness to accept thorough economic reform. Balcerowicz is wrong to presume that every capitalist is good: to the contrary, some have the capacity, through extant linkages to the state, to conspire against the public. Two theoretical points should be borne in mind when contemplating active democratic conflict. First, a democratic transition requires that struggle (‘a hot family feud’, as Rustow (1970: 355) has it) follow pacts – a sequence which, however, is probably now less suited to Russia than it is to East Central Europe. The second point is closely related to this. Tocqueville was essentially a pessimist about liberalization; nations which had liberty in aristocratic conditions have the right habits to sustain it in modernity, whilst those who had once lost their liberty thereafter find it almost impossible to regain, whatever the social conditions. None the less, if there is an activist hope in Tocqueville it is simple: the exercise of liberty can and will re-create trust, thereby making liberty secure.

CONCLUSION

The first conclusion, following the last remark, concerns difference. The period of vacuum is rather like the phoney war, a lull before the establishment of settled structures. It is very likely that a variety of regimes will follow the immediate post-communist period. At worst, Tocqueville may prove to be prescient.
The segregation of classes, which was the crime of the late monarchy, became at a late stage a justification for it, since when the wealthy and enlightened classes were no longer able to act in concert and to take part in the government, the country became, to all intents and purposes, incapable of administering itself and it was needful that a master should step in. (1955: 107)

Any such reversion to authoritarianism is likely to be married to nationalism, whose future role can scarcely be exaggerated. Further, it is very likely that different forms of corporatism – 'societal' ones including workers, 'statist' ones closest to new capitalists – will emerge in the region, given that this form has the capacity to manage crisis (Staniszkis 1992; Maier 1990). Only a few states are likely to make a full transition to recognizably western politics. The countries of the Vysehrad Triangle are obviously best favoured: they have some memory of oppositional politics from Austro-Hungary, broke clearly with communism, are beginning to gain stable political parties, suffer least from symbolic politics, are likely to draw most investment and may gain access to the European Community. Success is of course not guaranteed: nationalist sentiments may still cost Hungary dear, even if they have probably ensured Czech success – at the cost of Slovak backwardness; the European Community may seek to deepen rather than to broaden; and reversion to the interwar situation of a set of geopolitically non-viable states threatened on both sides is a real possibility. Slovenia may draw close to Austria, and the Baltic states to Scandinavia, thereby ensuring a successful transition. It is hard not to be more and more pessimistic, in contrast, the further towards the East that one looks. It is hard to see the role of the state diminishing in Bulgaria and Romania, whilst the situation in Russia is hugely threatening.

A second conclusion concerns the question of the speed with which reforms are enacted. It is very important to stress that speed is often confused with thoroughness: the Polish 'Big Bang' was not followed by further reforms, very much to the disappointment of many Polish commentators. One reason for that was the neo-liberal belief that all good things would automatically follow the introduction of markets. That was naive, most importantly because it ignored the need to address the democratic deficit. Further, generalization about speed is made difficult given differential capacities to adjust. This should not be taken necessarily to imply that speed was suitable for, say, Czechoslovakia but not for Russia; perhaps, to the contrary, the Czechs (but perhaps not the Slovaks) could afford to go slowly, whilst the window of opportunity in Russia was always so small that it had to be opened immediately. But with these reservations made, the generalization that speed is to be recommended can be made. The
economic radicals had the capacity to act, whereas the gradualists were immobilized by their distrust of capitalism; the mistakes of the former can be repaired but those of the latter may well be ruinous.

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NOTES

1. It is important to stress that Tocqueville understand the difference between jealously and envy (Cf. Scheok 1969).
2. It is well worth emphasizing in this connection that the collapse of socialism did not depend – except for the admittedly crucial exception of Solidarity (Kolakowski 1992) – upon pressures from below (Hall 1994: ch. 4).
4. Tocqueville’s comparison of the English and French states receives striking support from contemporary historians, most notably from John Brewer (1989).
5. I am indebted here to discussions with Anatoly Khazanov.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


